

# Muted Voices: High School Teachers, Composition, and the College Imperative

Author(s):

**Joseph Jones**

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## Introduction

H. I. Marrou's *A History of Education in Antiquity* offers an instructive observation, even though his purpose is to describe the relationship among the three strata of teachers within the Roman educational system of two thousand years ago. There were clear demarcations among the *grammaticus* (the lower or primary teacher), the *grammarian* (the middle level teacher), and the *rhetor* (the upper level teacher). As a higher educational level added subject matter to teach, some of what had formerly been its province was necessarily pushed down to the lower level. The demands of the *rhetor* always superseded the needs or domain of the *grammarian*. Marrou notes that the *rhetor* made very clear that certain of the rhetorical arts or acts, the *declamatio*, for example, were the presumed, exclusive province of the *rhetor*, and the *grammarian* was told, in effect, to keep hands off.

This early stratification among what we might now label the primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels of education persists. There are, of course, pertinent developmental and cognitive considerations that account for many of the distinctions among what is taught at each level. Yet within the discipline of English, always tentatively, provisionally—and often contentiously—defined by those who teach it, the relationship between college English and high school English has been marked by disputation and dismay. Those in college often feel under-served by the efforts of their colleagues in the high schools; high school teachers often feel belittled or ignored by their colleagues in college.

As a means of exploring this, I surveyed high school English students and teachers. I was particularly interested in hearing the voices of teachers and what they had to say about the teaching of writing. I wondered how their perceptions of college writing did—or didn't—influence or affect their work. Among most high school teachers there is a sense of allegiance to the notion of a K-13 (or even K-16) educational continuum, though that allegiance is too rarely reciprocated. Moreover, the curricular implications of such a continuum aren't often made explicit. High school teachers instead rely on and impart to their students only the most vague, and often misguided, sense of what occurs in the first-year college composition classroom. The disjunction between high school teachers and their colleagues in college is not, of course, a recent phenomenon, which is why I

think trying to understand it more fully is so important: conditions that persist often do so for reasons that fade through familiarity. Furthermore, considering that disjunction within an historical context can help us more fully understand the ways in which the origins of our points of commonality and contention still affect how we engage in the teaching of writing.

## Some Historical Markers Between School and College

Prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, there weren't many high schools, and those that existed were primarily "fitting schools" designed to prepare young men for college. Enrollment doubled and then doubled again in the years just before and just after the turn of the twentieth century, mirroring a similar boom in enrollment in American colleges that occurred over a generation or so. High schools became educational entities unto themselves, exploring other educational purposes in addition to college preparation. Schools came to be considered too by some as sites for social reform. Developments in psychology also came into play as emphasis shifted toward education based on the developmental characteristics of children as a refutation of the concepts of mental training and faculty psychology.

Accounts regarding the relations between colleges and secondary schools at the turn of the twentieth century describe them as disagreeable and often chaotic. Yet, as Arthur Applebee notes in his essential (and now out-of-print) history, *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English*, "Because one function of the high school was preparatory, and because then as now the success of its preparatory courses was more important to a school's prestige than its finishing courses, radical change was forced upon the schools in a remarkably short time" (31). The power of the colleges to dictate high school curriculum in the nascent discipline of English went largely unchallenged until after the turn of the twentieth century: "College entrance requirements were the moving force" (31). Eastern colleges did not accept admission by certificate from accredited high schools as many colleges in the Midwest and West had begun doing, insisting instead that prospective students pass a series of entrance examinations unique to each admitting institution. The University of Michigan's Fred Newton Scott, writing in 1901, likened the relationship between Eastern colleges and secondary schools to feudalism (366). Nicholas Murray Butler, professor of philosophy at Columbia who would play a pivotal role in the founding of the College Entrance Examination Board, depicts a system in which colleges "were going their several ways with sublime unconcern either for the policies of other colleges, for the needs of the secondary schools, or for the general public interest. They regarded themselves as wholly private institutions, and each indulged in some peculiar idiosyncrasy having to do with the admission of its freshman class" (2). Not surprisingly, college entrance tests often dictated curricula for preparatory schools or, at least, for English teachers, by dictating the texts students should study in school.

Applebee notes, in the second chapter of his history in a subsection appropriately titled "High School Against College," that these Uniform Lists, reading lists composed by the elite Eastern colleges, often dominated what literature was taught and were a primary determinant of high school English curricula, though the lists were objects of resistance and resentment by many high school teachers. High schools began developing new teaching methods that often diverged from college practices and included the following: the study of literature by genre; a more child-focused approach which emphasized enjoyment of literature and more contemporary literary works; and a consideration of vocational education and its implications for English teaching. The National Council of Teachers of English was founded in 1911, in large part as an effort by high schools to chart their own courses, develop their own curricula, and establish a fuller educational

mission than only preparing students for college.

The influence of the colleges nevertheless remained strong. Harvard's consternation at the "illiteracy" of its incoming students not only precipitated the institution of a required first-year composition course, it also began the persistent criticism of the schools and their shortcomings in the preparation of students for the rigors of college. James Berlin points out in *Rhetoric and Reality* that instituting first-year composition had the positive effect of granting composition status as a subject matter. It had the less positive effect, however, of construing as its primary concerns correctness and adherence to form, thus rendering the teaching of writing largely a remedial function ideally—from the colleges' perspective—left to the schools. The period considered in John Brereton's *The Origins of Composition Studies in the Colleges, 1875–1925* is noted for its turn away from the two thousand year old rhetorical tradition to the more streamlined, simplified composition course. Part of this "loss" was the result of positing composition as a "foundational" course at the beginning of college, for "along with the foundation came its reputation as a transition from high school to college [ . . . ] putting composition into the first year was a recognition of its newly developed remedial overtones: freshman year was to make up for what preparatory schools had failed to teach" (18). Harvard offered its first freshman composition course in 1885, prompted by the failure of more than half the students on its first entrance examination in written English in 1874, although "the required freshman composition course was never meant as a permanent English offering but was instead a temporary stopgap until the secondary schools could improve" (48–49). Toward that end, Harvard "began to prod its preparatory schools about improving their writing instruction, beginning a twenty-year-long acrimonious debate over composition in the schools" that included Harvard publishing "lengthy official reports pinpointing the problem and laying blame on the preparatory schools" (27). These reports were "part of an attempt to get the secondary schools to improve their writing instruction; in effect, though, they diminished the role of first-year composition and expressed the hope of removing it entirely from the college curriculum and placing it in the schools" (26).

## Relegating Composition to the Schools

Rather than re-tell the story of the development of first-year college English, my intention is to briefly explore the effects of its institution and development—and the attitudes that accompanied it—on high schools as a means of suggesting that those effects continue to affect the ways high school teachers teach writing. A document produced in the middle of the twentieth century will serve to connect the narrative begun in the previous section with the contemporary considerations that follow, for it offers what can be considered a rather typical estimation of the roles of college and secondary school teachers of English.

The *School and College Study of General Education* was a project funded by the Ford Foundation's Fund in 1951 to study the relationship between the last two years in secondary school and the first two years of college. The report that emerged from the study, *General Education in School and College: A Committee Report by Members of the Faculties of Andover, Exeter, Lawrenceville, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale*, acknowledges that their "thinking is based, in part, on current practices in our six institutions" (40), but that in itself makes the report an interesting artifact for the version of English it discloses. This report produced by Eastern, elite educational institutions can thus be read as a sort of petroglyph upon which many of the tensions between schools and colleges, as well as tensions within English studies, are written.

The headmaster at Andover, John M. Kemper, received a grant from the Fund to determine the best use of what those involved considered a crucial four years in a young

adult's academic development. The final report describes its study of 344 alumni from Andover, Exeter, and Lawrenceville who subsequently attended Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, and concludes that there was much needless duplication between college and high school courses in English. The respondents complained most of three things: "(1) poor teaching, especially in the first two years in college, (2) the impersonality of the large university, and (3), with special emphasis, the lack of stimulus to active, independent thinking in both school and college" (16).

Of more interest here, however, is the implicit reason for the separation of composition and literature that materializes in the committee's final report:

Therefore, the responsibility for training in the use of the English language is a joint and continuing responsibility of the school and college. Nevertheless, a sound foundation can and must be given in the schools. Elementary courses in language skills do not belong in the college. Until ways can be found to bring secondary school students to an adequate level of competence in such skills, higher education in America cannot do its proper work. (41)

Relegating the teaching of writing (defined as mechanics and skills instruction) as the primary responsibility of the schools echoes the attitude earlier asserted at Harvard in the 1880s (and reproduces Marrou's description of curricular relations among schools in ancient Rome). The committee's closing remarks regarding the teaching of English declares that the secondary school English teacher's responsibility for teaching both language and literature is a "problem," for this "multiplicity of aims and responsibilities of his field will prevent his concentrating his efforts effectively" (47). Writing instruction was seen as a remedial endeavor, unlike the teaching of literature, which "has traditionally been the central humanistic study of the curriculum" (*General Education* 78), a statement that, among other things, offers an abbreviated history of college English studies as well. Finally, the report makes clear that even though poor writing skills are a burden upon the colleges that the schools must alleviate, it falls upon the colleges "to encourage and stimulate increased concern for good writing on the part of the schools—student and teacher alike" (43). And the means of encouraging and stimulating increased concern? "Therefore, we urge the colleges to support the effort to institute a general composition test as a regular feature of college entrance examinations" for all college applicants—or, at least, applicants to the highly selected Eastern colleges (43). The addition of a writing component to the SAT some fifty years later thus seems a rather tired approach to an old complaint and one unlikely to ameliorate the conditions its advocates bemoan—though high school teachers will no doubt be urged or required to prepare their students to score well on the Writing Section of the "new" SAT.

## **High School Students Imagining College, Reflecting on High School**

High schools have thus always struggled with the nature of their educational mission. Not afforded the insularity of pursuing disciplinary knowledge as colleges often are, not funded to provide adequate vocational preparation demanded by the marketplace, and not entirely certain how best to prepare students for an amorphous notion of "citizenship" decreed by school boards, high schools have been more willing than resistant to take their lead from the colleges, particularly in the teaching of English. Because there exist so few efforts between high schools and colleges to coordinate curriculum, however, and because the students preparing to become secondary school teachers are rarely exposed to the college writing programs at the universities at which they matriculate except as students in the first-year program, teachers in the schools can't really know what they're preparing their students for. By default, high school teachers' own experiences, coupled with anecdote and lore, serve as the arbiter between high schools

and colleges. What does this mean for high school students?

I administered a survey at Catalina Foothills High School in the spring of 2000. A public high school in an affluent suburb of Tucson, Arizona, CFHS prides itself on its high test scores and its annual placement of more than 90% of its graduates in postsecondary educational institutions that range from the local community college to the Ivy League. Almost 300 graduating seniors (out of a class of 420) responded to a series of questions that asked that they reflect on their experiences in their high school English classes and imagine what their first-year college English classes might require. All but a handful of the respondents intended to enroll in college immediately after high school. I was interested in discovering how students classified their high school English experiences, hoping their perceptions could offer their teachers a richer, more complicated evaluation of their efforts. Given the student demographic found at Foothills, their teachers designed curricula and delivered instruction guided by the knowledge that most of their students were college-bound. That student responses imagine college English in mostly traditional ways is likely the result of descriptions of college English imparted by their high school teachers. (Among the most effective rebuttals a teacher can offer recalcitrant students is the claim, sometimes offered as admonishment, other times as threat, "You're going to need this in college.") Students typically discover, however, that much of what is deemed important in high school is not important in college, while teachers, often with the best intentions, compose curricula that only dimly portend the college composition classroom their students encounter.

When asked, *"Which types of writing have been most emphasized in your high school courses over the past two years?"* the most common responses, in order, were "the five paragraph essay" and "research reports." "Literary analysis" and "persuasive essays" tied as third most emphasized, and selected far less were "analytical essays," "personal narrative/memoir," "poetry," and writing "short stories." However, when asked, *"Which types of writing do you think will be emphasized in your college English course?"* students most frequently selected "literary analysis." Catalina Foothills has endeavored to put in place a comprehensive K-12 language arts curriculum. The districts' students engage in an array of writing activities throughout all grade levels, and its teachers are expected to facilitate a pedagogy informed by writing process in their classrooms. That the graduating seniors identified the five-paragraph essay and "research reports" as the most emphasized sorts of writing during their final two years of high school is likely not an indictment of the limited range of writing experiences offered by their English teachers because students were also considering the writing they did in their other classes as well. It remains typical of secondary school teachers in other subject matters to valorize and reward the straightforward organizational pattern of the five-paragraph essay. Of greater interest for my purposes is the assumption by graduating seniors that literary analysis would be the type of writing most emphasized in their college English courses. While certainly true for those who become English majors, there aren't many first-year composition classes centered on the explication of literature.

Students were also asked to identify, *"Which writing skills have been most emphasized in your high school English courses over the past two years?"* The most common response was "including a thesis." They expected college English would require more, however. *"Which writing skills do you think will be most emphasized in your college English courses?"* elicited, in order, the following: "developing an argument," "incorporating other sources into my paper," and "exploring and developing ideas."

Nearly a hundred of these students participated in a follow-up survey after their first semester of college. Over half of those respondents attended the University of Arizona while others attended public and private colleges and universities across the country. The results of this follow-up survey revealed that students recognized a shift in what they

were being asked to do with their writing. “Including a thesis” remained important, but what counted as a “thesis” had changed. In high school, a thesis meant one’s “main idea”; in college writing, a thesis meant one’s “central argument.” The demands of defending an argument are qualitatively different from explaining a main idea. I think high school teachers may see their insistence that all writing be governed by a thesis as developmentally pertinent, but students saw little connection between the two different senses of “thesis.”

The most frequently selected responses in the follow-up survey to the question, “*Which types of writing were emphasized in your college English course?*,” were “analytical essays” and “literary analysis.” When these responses were probed a bit more deeply, what emerged was that both the “analytical essays” and “literary analysis” students described referred to the analysis of nonfiction texts, something they did very little of in their high school English classes. In their high school classes, literary analysis referred only to “Literature” (i.e., fiction, poetry, and drama).

The responses from those who had completed their first semester of college English actually corresponded to the students’ previous expectations regarding the sort of skills they imagined would be emphasized in their college English course. The three most common skills emphasized in their college English course were “developing an argument,” “exploring and developing ideas,” and “incorporating other sources into my paper.” While it is encouraging that students had a clear sense of the sort of writing tasks they were likely to encounter in first-year college English, when the results of the survey were shared with their teachers, the teachers were disappointed that their students didn’t recognize that these were precisely the skills they had been trying to develop in their high school classes. Instead, as reported above, students overwhelmingly concluded that the fundamental writing skill most emphasized in their high school courses was “including a thesis,” which for some students apparently seemed an end in itself, with all other skills and purposes diffused, none emerging as more important than another.

Finally, the graduating high school seniors had determined that “*the primary purpose of high school English has been to*” “develop my thinking and analytical skills,” “teach me how to write persuasively,” and “teach me how to write five-paragraph essays.” They imagined “*the primary purpose of freshman college English will be to*” “develop my thinking and analytical skills,” “introduce me to classic works of literature,” and “teach me how to write persuasively.” The responses from those who had completed a first semester of college English, however, indicated they found the “*primary purpose of freshman college English seemed to be to*” “develop my thinking and analytical skills” and “teach me how to write persuasively.” We might all be heartened that these students recognized so encompassing a purpose to our work with them as that of developing their “thinking and analytical skills.” (One of their response choices was “to write grammatically correct English.”) The absence of “classic works of literature” from their actual first-year college English experience is of particular interest here, for I assume that what students imagined the nature of college English would be was primarily derived from descriptions of college English classes from their teachers (though, of course, older siblings, parents, and acquaintances may have contributed to their perceptions as well). The disjunctions between students’ imagined experiences and their actual experiences do not necessarily reveal inadequate academic preparation, but they suggest insufficient articulation between the schools and colleges. When high school teachers describe college English to their students, is it a “typical” first-year English course they describe? Or do they describe the sort of upper-division English course that, as English majors, may in large measure define for them what they imagine English is—or is supposed to be?

## The Intentions of High School Teachers

In the spring of 2004 I submitted a related questionnaire to the English teachers at Catalina Foothills High School. The English department had 15 members; eight responded in writing to the survey questions. Of those eight, all but two had earned M.A. degrees in either English or English education. Foothills recruits nationally for its faculty, and its English teachers came from all over the country. Half of the respondents were in their first five years of teaching. None of the teachers defined their classes primarily in terms of its function as preparation for college; all assumed fuller purposes for their courses than only that. Nevertheless, the questions I put to them emphasized their perceived connections between high school and college English, and I was most interested in listening to what they said about the ways their teaching of writing was influenced by the specter of college. None of the respondents reported that such college connections or expectations had ever been made explicit in their preparation as English teachers. Instead, the most common response from the teachers to the question, “*What most informs your attitudes about preparing your students for college English?*,” is represented by the following: “Mostly my own experiences shape my attitudes. I have former students stop by or e-mail me and give me input on the types of assignments they have to complete in college English courses, and in doing so they have let me know what they wish they had learned in high school.”

Those in the schools, especially those in public schools, are subject to myriad constraints and demands, mostly imposed by forces exerted from beyond their classrooms. Such constraints and demands, for better *and* worse, tend to define what gets done—and what is imagined it is possible to do. The teachers’ responses below reveal both the tensions they feel and the guidance they’ve appropriated from what they understand as the college imperative imposed upon their work.

*“How does the prospect of college English affect the ways you teach writing?”*

- “Based on my own experience in college, I feel like I have an obligation to emphasize literary analysis and argumentation at the expense, perhaps, of the types of writing many of my students prefer (i.e., personal narrative, fiction writing, etc.).”
- “I often assume my students will do things like ‘critical analysis’ in college . . . and that is in my mind.”
- “I stress academic writing more than creative writing, knowing that my juniors and seniors are close to college classes.”
- “I feel it affects writing instruction the most. I find myself believing that students need exposure to and practice writing essays so that they understand structure and work on supporting their assertions.”
- “I’m not sure it does—except I feel a great awareness of the lit analysis essay; one of the massive gravitational forces that pull us all toward the five paragraph essay (which is like the prenatal lit essay, right?).”

Not surprisingly the teachers’ responses echo the students’ reflections and imaginings cited earlier. The teachers seem intent on replicating some of the more traditional features and values of English teaching in their efforts to prepare their students for what they imagine they’ll encounter in college. That these conscientious teachers feel particularly pressed by the demands of literary analysis is not surprising, though, as I suggested earlier, few non-English majors will be required to engage in the sort of literary analysis their high school teachers did while completing undergraduate degrees. Nevertheless, the prospect of “academic writing” is rendered in terms of some version of the literary analysis essay.

High school teachers have been largely trapped in approaches to literature and composition that are vestiges of approaches that have since been reconsidered—though certainly not entirely abandoned—by those in college. The ascension of literature as the constituting concern of English—at the expense of rhetoric—is a tale that has been well told by histories of rhetoric and composition studies (Berlin, Miller, and Winterowd). While such histories don't speak with a single voice or tell a simple story, each in its own way describes fundamental epistemological, social, and political impulses and allegiances that instituted literature at the center of English studies. Former *English Journal* editor Ben Nelms notes in his historical overview of the emergence of English as a school subject that “what could have been two separate disciplines, communication (or rhetoric, it might have been called then) and literature, were joined together in holy matrimony” (50). Perhaps like most marriages, though, one partner soon emerged as more equal than the other. Literature was privileged for a variety of reasons, though the most enduring is the conviction that literary texts embody inherent qualities of value that can be approached in ways that reward the appropriately reverent and complicit reader with both skills and “culture.” Literature occupies the center of English studies at the college level, and, despite the historical imperative from colleges that secondary school teachers attend first to what colleges deemed the poor writing skills of incoming students, the high school English curriculum often replicated college English departments by centering efforts on the teaching of literature—not only as a means of preparing its students for college but also because high school teachers received their own instruction and training primarily in the study and explication of literature. Most high school teachers remain committed and allegiant to a formalist approach to the teaching of literature with occasional nods to what Kathleen McCormick names expressivist (reader response) approaches to literature, though, as Applebee discovered in his survey of high school literature instruction, such nods are primarily employed only as a preliminary means of generating student interest or as a segue to journal responses rather than as a means toward genuine textual interpretation (*Literature*).

*“Are there certain skills, activities, assignments you feel obligated to teach because you think students will need them in college?”*

- “I feel somewhat obligated to teach research skills (MLA documentation) and the writing of analytical essays on literature.”
- “MLA citation often feels obligatory. The big, bad research paper (that archaic thing that seems to serve little or no purpose in our flash-in-the-pan society) is another assignment I push my students through each year.”
- “Generally, I try to choose assignments that will help students turn the corner from ‘writing to write’ to ‘writing to be read’ (assuming that they will be writing in college).”
- “Essay, essay, essay.”
- “No. If there is no inherent worth in the activities themselves, I don’t feel any pressure to teach them, other than the pressure our district’s standards and benchmarks provide.”
- “No—although if I really thought about it, maybe some of what I think is valuable for students in ‘real life’ really is only used in college. I mean, whoever cites their sources thoroughly in the real world?”
- “Recently, as I’ve heard more from students who have gone on to college, I’ve come to realize that my own college experience is not reflective of the experience most of my students are likely to have. I feel like I need to keep this in mind when I’m tempted to justify my instructional strategies this way.”

Their responses reveal how deeply these teachers consider their practice. It becomes clear too how they wrestle with the obligation they feel toward their students, toward what



they imagine occurs in college, and toward their own sense of what matters in English studies.

The construction of English as a discipline or subject matter remains an active, contested site within the academy. As those within the academy recompose English studies, however, those in the schools remain distant and mostly excluded from that conversation. Irvin Peckham's "Whispers from the Margin: A Class-based Interpretation of the Conflict Between High School and College Writing Teachers" in *History, Reflection, and Narrative: The Professionalization of Composition, 1963–1983*, describes the exclusion of high school teachers from the histories of composition studies and the lack of dialogue between high school and college writing teachers in terms of a class orientation that results from working conditions: "At the high school level, teachers are oriented toward teaching; at the college level, professors are oriented toward research, theory, and publication. These different orientations mirror the different orientations among classes" (263). The reflexivity that has reinvigorated the conception—and broadened the purview—of English at the postsecondary level over the past thirty years or so, has been only haphazardly considered and imperfectly implemented at the secondary level.

Most high school English teachers appropriate only those disciplinary lines of inquiry that they perceive might have some practical application. High school English teachers are less prone to disciplinary reappraisal and reconstruction. College English studies continues to push the borders of its disciplinary lines of inquiry, but the high school English teacher realizes what the teacher of first-year college comp also realizes: the vast majority of one's students will not become English majors. The charge of the high school English teacher, then, persists in the direction it has moved during the past century, first defined in 1894 in the *Report of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies*: "(1) to enable the pupil to understand the expressed thoughts of others and to give expression to thoughts of his [sic] own; and (2) to cultivate a taste for reading, to give the pupil some acquaintance with good literature, and to furnish him [sic] with the means of extending that acquaintance" (86).

Within the realm of writing instruction, high school teachers have embraced—at least in spirit—writing process pedagogy. Every secondary school English teacher is familiar with the call for process. Indeed, diagrams of the writing process or posters defining each aspect of the process adorn countless secondary school English classroom walls. Observation of classroom practices often reveals a rigid sense of "process" as students are marched through the Writing Process like soldiers on maneuvers. Writing as process has been reconsidered and problematized by many in composition studies, but writing as a mostly linear set of stages has offered a particularly appealing pedagogy for many in the classroom for whom management of a daunting number of students and volume of paper is a genuine concern. The "process" has thus been reified in ways that secondary school teachers are loathe to reconsider.

The teacher responses to the question, "*If students weren't going to college, would you teach English differently?*," reveal how earnestly and dutifully the teachers endeavor to comply with what they imagine college English requires of them (and their students). The responses reveal how the college imperative, though haphazardly articulated and inconsistently acknowledged, provides purpose for some of their work with students. That purpose seems tempered, however, by a measured resentment toward the constraints the teachers perceive the college imperative imposes. Their answers imply that those constraints keep them from engaging in more meaningful work with their students.

- "Yes . . . but I have no idea how I would go about teaching English to students not

headed to college. I'm tempted to say something like 'I'd teach writing with more real world applications' but I have no idea what that means. I presume that I'd worry less about mechanics (MLA citation, for instance)."

- "I would not do a formal research paper with MLA and in-text citation, etc. I would still teach argument, personal narrative writing, and speech. I would still do the skill work."
- "I would teach more real world writing such as letter-writing and possibly design more creative opportunities."
- "I'd push harder for different literary selections in the curriculum. Less of the literary canon; more works that were specifically relevant to whatever the 'non-college bound' kids were interested in."
- "I might feel more desperate. I might try to shove 'the classics' at them, or critical theory, but I believe that would be wrong-headed. It is nice to know that they will be exposed to ever more sophisticated texts and ever more sophisticated ways of looking at them."
- "The assumed audiences and purposes of some of the writing would change, but I suppose I would still try to get students to produce focused, clear, complete and interesting writing."
- "Perhaps if I knew students weren't going to college I would focus more on personal writing and perhaps business writing, but I can't say for sure."

## Closing Words

My purposes in exploring teacher perceptions of the tacit college imperative they have assumed is motivated by my concern that we do our colleagues in the schools a disservice by not including them more fully and more frequently in our disciplinary conversations. One of the teachers surveyed remarked that her attitudes about preparing students for college are most informed by "my own experiences and what I assume is historical precedent." I've tried to demonstrate that historical precedent is more heavy-handed and delimiting than most of us are aware. But if the problem is not new, neither are some of its more accessible means of redress. In a survey and review published in 1928, *A Study of the Teaching of English Composition in Teachers Colleges in the United States*, its author declares: "Since English composition is the only universally required subject in college that depends entirely upon the student's work in the high school, there should be a closer relationship existing between the teacher of composition in the high school and the teacher of composition in the teachers college" (Meadows 25). No teacher preparation program can adequately address everything prospective teachers should know before they enter the classroom, but since much of the daily work of high school teachers is influenced by the prospect of college English, English education programs should provide their students with at least a sense of what actually occurs in the English department's freshman writing program. College writing programs do themselves, local high school teachers, and incoming students a disservice by not inviting both prospective and current classroom teachers into their programs to participate in collaborative conversations about the objectives of their programs and their expectations for the students who enroll. Articulating a curricular sequence between the schools and the colleges is not likely to occur, and may not even be entirely desirable, but clarifying for high school teachers the kinds of work assigned and skills engaged in the first-year course can occur with modest investments in time and energy by all those involved.

The final question I asked the Foothills High teachers, "*How do you see the relationship between high school and college English? Is there perhaps a metaphor you invoke?*," reveals the distance most high school teachers feel between themselves and their work and that of their colleagues in the colleges.

- “I think high school is somewhat like a rehearsal for the ‘real show’ that college is supposed to be. I guess a metaphor that comes to mind is the concept of training wheels—high school serves to stabilize students until they are ready for two-wheels. Sometimes I feel that we are a bit like a holding cell before students go to the big house.”
- “For non-English majors, college English is a hoop to jump through to get the degree you want for the job you want. Sure, there are skills they’ll agree are important, but I think most people think they can figure those out on their own. So that makes high school English simply a training regimen to help one jump through the hoops.”
- “Perhaps a funnel? High school English has such broad purposes: communication, writing, reading, etc. College English, at least for me, was an extremely narrow, focused study of literature and literary theory that at times seemed unnecessarily esoteric and devoid of any ‘real life’ purpose/application. Reading Lacan and Derrida certainly didn’t help prepare me to work as an editor, as a public relations writer, or as a teacher of 9th grade literature.”
- “The image in my head is a group of college professors (tweedeed out, of course) pointing fingers and shaking their heads at high school teachers. The high school teachers, in response, are either crying in embarrassment or giving the college professors the finger.”

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